

Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of Municipal District of Baltinglass held in County Buildings, Wicklow on 11th December 2023 at 3pm.

Present: Cathaoirleach Edward Timmins
Councillor Vincent Blake
Councillor Avril Cronin
Councillor John Mullen
Councillor Gerry O’Neill
Councillor Patsy Glennon

In Attendance: Ms. Breege Kilkenny, District Manager
(Got delayed, joined the meeting at 3:20pm)
Mr. Pat Byrne, Senior Executive Engineer
Mr. Dermot Graham, Executive Engineer
Mr. Liam Cullen, District Administrator
Ms. Aideen Russell, Assistant Staff Officer

Apologies: Cllr. Glennon asked to be excused from the meeting at 3:30pm.
He returned to the meeting at 3:44pm.

Cathaoirleach Edward Timmins opened the December meeting of Baltinglass Municipal District and welcomed all present.

1. To confirm and sign minutes of the rescheduled Ordinary Meeting of the Municipal District of Baltinglass dated 4th December 2023.

It was proposed by Cllr. Cronin, seconded by Cllr. Mullen and unanimously agreed to confirm and sign the minutes of the rescheduled Ordinary Meeting of the Municipal District of Baltinglass dated 4th December 2023.

2. Matters Arising – None.

3. To Consider Roads Reports (national and non-national roads)

The District Engineers updated the members on the Baltinglass MD national and non-national roads reports, both of which were circulated to the members prior to the meeting.

Mr. Byrne advised The Members that cleaning was planned for part of the N81. Due to commence at 6am on Saturday 16th December 2023, weather permitting.

Members Comments and Observations (national roads)

- Cllr. Blake enquired what method of cleaning would be used on the N81.
 - The Members were advised by District Engineers that high pressure washing would be used on both sides of the road. The cost of which would be in the region of €2,500.00.
- Cllr. Timmins stated that safety improvement works on Baltinglass Bridge for both pedestrians and motorists should be given the upmost priority, highlighting that the junction is extremely dangerous.

A discussion took place regarding Baltinglass Town Centre, it was mentioned that at a recent Community SPC meeting, the proposed public realm works were discussed and that during this discussion it was made clear to all present that the people of Baltinglass are frustrated with the lack of progress on this project. The members were of the opinion that discussions being held at such meetings are timely and will focus Wicklow County Council officials on getting this project commenced as soon as possible. The District Engineers informed the Members that they have been assured that the work will commence in January 2024 and that they will keep the pressure on to ensure work commences.

Members Comments and Observations (non national roads)

- Cllr. Mullen said that he was aware that works on Rathcot Lane are due to happen under the CIS but asked that potholes on the lane be addressed in the meantime.
- Cllr. O'Neill thanked the District Engineers for all the road works carried out during 2023 and commended all associated with same.
 - Mr. Graham thanked the Councillors who have been promoting the CIS.
- Cllr. Mullen advised that the Kennystown CIS hadn't been successful as the public contribution would have been too large. He asked was an application for a one off flooding payment an option to fund these works.
 - Mr. Graham advised that he would discuss this option with the Wexford Engineer who had received funding for a neighbouring project.
- Cllr. Glennon & Cllr. Timmins requested that white lining be carried out in Kiltegan and Baltinglass, when and where possible.

4. Update on Active Travel Projects

The District Engineers updated the members on the Active Travel and Rural Fund Progress Report, which was circulated to the members prior to the meeting.

Members Comments and Observations (national roads)

- Cllr. Mullen thanked the District Engineers for their work to date on Active Travel. He acknowledged that more funding is required and said we should keep this report on the Agenda.
 - Cllr. Timmins said that big urban areas are still receiving funding into 2024. Mr. Byrne agreed that further funding is required for rural travel.
- Cllr. Blake enquired about the funding available for footpath repairs, he said funding was available for the construction of new footpaths but that there was a serious lack of funding for repairs to existing footpaths. Cllr. Blake asked that alternative sources of funding be investigated.
 - Mr. Graham agreed with Cllr. Blake and said that there is a list of footpaths which need addressing. He expressed the need to get the situation of footpath repairs on the radar.
 - Cllr. Mullen asked that the funding situation with footpaths, which are not fit for purpose, be brought up at senior management level. He acknowledged a pilot project in progress regarding village centre accessibility.
 - Mr. Byrne commented that this project is recognising the issues, but, getting funding to carry out works highlighted in the report is the problem.
 - Ms. Kilkeny said that she will speak to the Roads DOS, Ms. Earls and also the CCSD Disability Officer regarding the footpath issues.
 - Cllr. Timmins stated that footpath repairs should be treated like road repairs, on an assessment of needs basis.
- Cllr. O'Neill brought up the safety issues at the crèche in Donard.
 - Mr. Byrne stated that Wicklow County Council have tried to resolve the problem by proposing the implementation of a safety scheme, however, this has not received support locally. Obtaining land and funding are required to progress any safety scheme project in this area.

5. Emergency accommodation – Baltinglass Municipal District

Members Comments and Observations

- Cllr. O'Neill highlighted ongoing concerns brought to his attention by members of the public regarding landlords who are issuing notices to quit to long-term tenants. He believes these properties will be then used for emergency accommodation, which will be funded by government, allowing landlords to

make big money, he believes landlord's greed is adding to the widespread housing crisis we are facing.

Cllr. O'Neill stated that the public meetings held to discuss the above were attended by both national and non-national members of the public and he wished to refute the accusations that they were racist gatherings. He expressed concerns regarding an email sent from one Blessington forum member to another which was brought to his attention stating that attendees of these meetings were in some way racist.

- Cllr. Glennon stated that he attended the public gathering on the 9th December 2023 to listen to what was being said and that he would form his own views and act accordingly. He felt the Elected Members were clear and justified in their reasons for voting the way they did with regard to the provision of modular homes in the district.
- Cllr. Mullen spoke about the new Local Authority Integration Team which is being set up and funded by the Department. He hoped that staff appointed to this group will engage with The Members, which in turn will improve communication with the public and help to address the miss-information and scare mongering which is circulating and creating fear.
- Cllr. Timmins reiterated the importance of facts and not rumours. He also stated that he made it very clear from the outset why he did not support the process used for land selection for modular homes in the district.
- Ms. Kilkeny ensured The Members that she would bring all concerns back to the Management Team meeting which is being held on Tuesday 19th December 2023.
- Cllr. O'Neill asked, unsuccessfully, on a number of occasions throughout the discussion, for a seconder for his proposal for The Members to write to the Minister to voice their concerns regarding the government's housing/immigration policy.
 - Cllr. Timmins stated that he as Cathaoirleach had already written to The Minister addressing concerns and asking him to explain the figures relating to the financial spending on accommodation.
 - Cllr. Glennon stated that all the above was due to be discussed at government cabinet on Tuesday 12th December 2023, and that he felt that the cabinet was the appropriate place for this discussion.

6. Twinning Correspondence – Castel Maggiore

- Cllr. Timmins informed The Members that an email was sent to all regarding an invitation to Castle Maggiore in April 2024, and asked if same could be discussed at a future meeting.

7. Correspondence

- Mr. Cullen informed The Members that correspondence was received from a representative from Qualitas, who have responsibility for the maintenance of The Mall Newtown Centre. In their correspondence they have stated that they are agreeable to a meeting with Wicklow County Council to discuss ongoing issues at the town centre area.
 - Cllr. Cronin advised The Members that she had spoken with the new superintendent for Blessington who had informed her that his first day on the job was dealing with the petrol bomb incident at the centre. He said that Wicklow County Council and The Members could contact him at any stage to discuss matters further.
 - A discussion was held regarding Garda numbers in Blessington and a new management structure planned for the county. Cllr. Cronin expressed her disappointment at the amount of time Chief Commissioner Harris had spent at his recent visit to Wicklow County Council which did not allow for discussions regarding the above.
 - It was proposed by Cllr. Timmins, seconded by Cllr. Cronin and unanimously agreed to contact the Chief Commissioner directly to voice concerns regarding Blessington losing their Superintendent, which would see the district fall further behind the rest of the county.
- Mr. Cullen informed The Members that Baltinglass MD were running a shop local campaign for the month of December which consisted of a “Find the Elf” competition. Prizes will be presented to winners and their schools in January 2024.

8. Any other business - None

9. Date of next meeting

The next Baltinglass Municipal District meeting will be held on the 22nd January 2024.

There being no other business, Cllr. Timmins, concluded the meeting.

Signed: _____
CATHAOIRLEACH

Signed: _____
DISTRICT ADMINISTRATOR

Dated: _____